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Woodward and Rowlandson, Setting Out for Margate. 1812. Case W778 .186 English Caricatures NL 1476.

## **The Newberry Library Bulletin, May 1952**

**By Richard D. Altick**

The men of nineteenth-century England often spoke of themselves as living in an “age of periodicals.” Whether or not this was a phrase of self-congratulation depended on the speaker and on the time. It might signify one’s satisfaction at the broad diffusion of knowledge that the spectacular increase of periodical literature represented, or it might express the despair of the fastidious at that other signal accomplishment of periodicals, the debasement and vulgarization of contemporary culture. Whatever the tone of voice in which the phrase was uttered, there can be no doubt that in retrospect it sums up the most important tendencies of the era. Periodicals were, indeed, the nineteenth century’s most characteristic products; they constitute a comprehensive symbol of the age. They were called forth by the very circumstances which determined the cultural climate of the time: the neo-Puritan emphasis upon reading for moral and religious, as well as intellectual, elevation; the political ferment of the first half of the century, which by producing a mass of “seditious” literature aroused the ruling classes to fight the fire with the new fire of cheap and respectably oriented reading matter; the inexorable spread of basic literacy; the increase of leisure, and the gradually rising prosperity of the people; the sanctity of the middle class domestic circle, where family reading was a ritual; the scruples of the age against gin palaces, theaters, and similar types of recreation. And it was the periodical, far more than the book, which benefited from the technological changes in an industrialized Britain. Thanks to the cheapness made possible by mass production and new channels of distribution, the

periodical achieved a place in the nineteenth-century social scene which is no more than matched, certainly not surpassed, by its omnipresence in our own.

The importance of a research library's collection of nineteenth-century English periodicals is growing rapidly, for several reasons. One is that that century, and more especially the Victorian age, is one of the conspicuously "coming" fields of literary research and critical interpretation. Another is that periodicals themselves have of late become recognized as legitimate objects of study, chiefly because they reflect with unique fullness and clarity the social and cultural trends of their time, and because so much of the great literary work of the nineteenth century first appeared in them and was vitally affected by the exigencies of serial publication. There have already been a number of valuable books on individual periodicals such as the *Fortnightly*, the *Monthly Repository*, the *Westminster*, the *Athenaeum*, *Fraser's*, and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and more are to come. And the fact that there are now two separate informal news sheets in the field, the *Periodical Post-Boy* and the *Coranto*, suggests how many American scholars are working this hitherto overlooked lode. Finally, one of the major developments in literary study recently has been the tendency of scholars to seek in social or popular cultural history the answers to problems which previously were formulated—and answered—in exclusively literary terms. In the case of the nineteenth century, one cannot possibly understand the spirit of the age without being saturated with the spirit of its periodicals.

The Newberry is in excellent shape to meet the requirements of scholars affected by these new trends. Less newsworthy than some of the unique or near-unique items I shall mention in a moment, but at least as important, is the nucleus of the periodical collection, the long files of those renews and magazines which were of sufficient distinction and influence in their time merit mention in the general accounts of English cultural and literary history. In this category of indispensable "standard" periodicals, in which I should include some thirty or forty titles, the Newberry compares well with the best university libraries in the country, which is to say that it is virtually complete. It has perfect files of the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, and of the *Westminster*, the *Contemporary*, the *Nineteenth Century*, the *Fortnightly*, and the rest. Among the literary weeklies, the *Athenaeum*, the *Spectator*, and the *Academy* are represented by complete files, while the *Literary Gazette* is present for its earlier, and much more important, period. All of the great magazines for the upper middle class are here: *Blackwood's*, *Cornhill*, *Macmillan's*, *St. Paul's*, *Temple Bar*. Finally, there are files of the principal magazines which specialized in fiction, from *Bentley's Miscellany*, *Ainsworth's*, *Belgravia*, *Argosy*, down to *Tinsley's* and the *Strand*.

Beyond this indispensable nucleus, the remarkable quality of the Newberry periodical collection is not so much bulk (though it is big enough, heaven knows) as representativeness. A scholar needing to see, say, a certain London satirical journal which gave up the ghost at the end of Volume One, might not find it in the library; but, after some experience of the way in which the Newberry's atmosphere is curiously conducive to serendipity, I should not lay very long odds against it. A little exercise in statistical bibliography confirms my impression. Having made a list at utter random of seventy-six out of the hundreds of short-lived and obscure nineteenth-century periodicals from England, Scotland, and Wales which are held, in complete or partial files, by the library, I consulted the *Union List of Serials* for other American libraries possessing those journals. Nine of those titles are found only in the Newberry. Five more exist in only one other

copy in the United States. Six others are found in only two other places, and the same number are duplicated by three, four, and five libraries. Seven of the Newberry's titles exist in six other libraries. Thus forty-three of the seventy-six periodicals on my list proved to be held by no more than seven libraries in the country. Allowing the Newberry the handicap it deserves because it limits its collection to the humanities alone, as none of its rivals does, I should place it among the first five or six libraries in the United States in respect of nineteenth-century periodicals.

The comprehensiveness of the collection enables the reader to study quite intensively virtually any of the chief subjects involving periodicals. For example, one of the most significant phenomena in the history of nineteenth-century English popular culture was the development of the cheap press. The Newberry provides abundant material for the study of this tendency. It has a file of John Limbird's *Mirror* (1822-44), the first low-priced literary periodical to survive for more than a season or two. Of even greater interest is the rare file of *The Cheap Magazine*; or *Poor Man's Fireside Companion*, published in 1813 by George Miller and Son, Haddington, a forty-eight-page monthly magazine, selling for fourpence, which had for its avowed purpose the diverting of the dangerous energies of the northern peasant and laborer into peaceful, moral channels. Careful browsing in the Newberry stacks will reveal a number of other periodicals, priced at a penny or two, which had the same laudable aim but were regrettably in advance of their time. The first triumphs of the cheap periodical movement may be studied in the library's files of Charles Knight's *Penny Magazine*, *Chambers' Journal* (the most successful and influential of all the low-priced weeklies), and the *Saturday Magazine*, published by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. These three periodicals together, by their unprecedentedly wide circulation, proved the existence of a vast public hungry for simple and edifying reading matter; and in their wake (and often in their image) came hundreds of other cheap periodicals, some of which were doomed to brief lives, while others enjoyed considerable prosperity. In the Newberry one may examine diverse samples of both types: among the former, the *Halfpenny Magazine* (1840-41: a unique file) and the *Farthing Journal*, a *Pearl of Small Price* (1841); and among the latter, the extensive files of *Cassell's Family Newspaper*, *Leisure Hour*, and that classic solace of the Victorian servant girl, the *Family Herald*, all of which achieved immense circulation in their time. As illustrations of the dawn of the age of the picture paper, which extended the power of the press to those countless thousands unable or disinclined to read more than captions, the library provides files of the *Graphic*, the *Illustrated Times*, and the *Illustrated London News*. Finally, there is a one-volume collection of certain London weeklies issued between 1848 and 1850: *The Town*, *Peeping Tom*, *Paul Pry*, *Cheap John*, and *The Fast Man*, of interest to historians of culture since it should serve to remove the stigma of excessive prudery which is customarily attached to the Victorian era.

Since no effort has been made to acquire any particular genres of periodicals to the neglect of others, the library's collection offers an accurate cross-section of nineteenth-century English journalism. And one of the aspects of that journalism, which especially impresses even a specialist as he goes through the Newberry shelves, is the high incidence of comic and satirical weeklies from the beginning of the century to the end. A number of recent writers, attacking the still current notion that the Victorians were deficient in humor, have reminded us of the rich comic heritage they have left us, above all, so far as periodicals are concerned, in *Punch*. But *Punch* was merely the one spectacular success in a genre which numbers literally hundreds of titles, from the *New Wit's Magazine*, and *Eccentric Calendar* (1805), the *Satirist or Monthly*

*Meteor* (1807-09), and the *Spy* (1810-11) to George Augustus Sala's *Banter* (1867-68) and *Zoz* (Dublin, 1876-79), a journal of more than ordinary interest because of the able drawings of its staff artist, "Spex," and because it was produced, not from types and engraved blocks, but by lithography. The very titles of some of the comic papers in the library are testimony to the all-powerful name of *Punch: Judy* (itself a success, with a run of twenty years), *Punchinello*, *Puppet-Show*... The future authority on Victorian humor and satire could do far worse than immerse himself for several months in the Newberry's periodical stacks.

From *Punch* on down to the most humble and/or scurrilous fly-by-night paper, the spirit that informs nineteenth-century English comic periodicals is one of topical, and above all political, satire. One might say that our great-grandfathers took their politics so seriously that they seemingly never tired of laughing at them under the auspices of their comic weeklies. But the political events of the day were responsible for another kind of journalism, a kind which, indeed, bulks quantitatively as large as the comic. Had it not been for the newly rediscovered power of the press—employed in this period as it had not been since the Commonwealth—the political history of the nineteenth century would have been very different. The Newberry collection of political papers, in conjunction with the library's fine assemblage of pamphlets and other material relating to the radical movements of the first half of the century, is a rich field for specialized investigation. The reader of, for example, the works of J. L. and Barbara Hammond may turn directly to the slender files of many of the periodicals there alluded to. In these papers there is little of the laughter which permeates the comic journals; if there is humor at all, it is the unsmiling laughter of social indignation, of passionate hatred of the political and economic inequities which made life hell for millions of the downtrodden. But there is variety, if not of tone, at least of point of view. From the first decades of the century we have, at one extreme, the essentially reactionary radicalism of Cobbett, with his *Political Register* and *Two-penny Trash* (the Newberry file is one of only two in the United States) and *The Poor Man's Friend*, and at the other extreme, but with very different programs, William Hone's *Reformists' Register*, Robert Owen's *Crisis*, Wooler's *Black Dwarf*, and the Paineian fervor of such crudely-printed penny sheets as the *Medusa*, or *Penny Politician*, papers which the government went to all possible measures to suppress and which are, in consequence, very difficult to find today.

The discontent of the 1830s and 1840s is mirrored in such papers as the *Chartist Circular*, Richard Oastler's *Fleet Papers*, and *Heywoods Herald of the Future*, the last-named being found in only one other American library. The most memorable journalistic product of the Chartist crisis of 1848 was the shortlived *Politics for the People*, a weekly issued by the group around Charles Kingsley which advocated reasonable, peaceful measures in the struggle to achieve the Chartists' just demands. The Newberry copy of the paper was owned by Priscilla H. Maurice, sister of one of the chief contributors, who annotated the margins with the names of the authors of virtually all the articles and poems.

In the latter half of the century there were, rather surprisingly, few periodicals dedicated to the serious, nonpolitical discussion of the multifarious social problems left over from the time when they were lumped together as "the Condition of England question." The shilling quarterly, *Meliora*, was one of those few, because, despite the editors' partiality to temperance propaganda, it was primarily an organ of general social improvement. An even more valuable source is the Newberry's complete file of the *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of*

*Social Science*, in whose thick volumes are collected the papers read at the annual "Social Science Congresses" during the mid-Victorian decades. These papers present a wealth of data on contemporary legal, educational, social, economic, and "sanitary" problems, as well as a wide spectrum of proposals for their solution.

The taste of the Victorians has more often been the occasion of laughter than of sympathetic study, but there are signs that the tide is turning and that in the near future Victorian fine art, architecture, decoration, and music will be examined with scholarly objectivity. The Newberry possesses a number of the periodicals essential to such study: the *Art Journal*, a long lived mirror of contemporary taste and practice in the graphic arts; the *Builder*, which documents the dismal preferences of the age in the construction of villas for the nouveaux riches, railway termini, and Albert Halls; the *Ecclesiologist*, without which it is impossible to understand the aesthetic and religious rationale that lay behind the emergence of "Victorian Gothic"; and the *Musical Times*, established in the age of Clara Novello and Jenny Lind and still current, which is, as Percy Scholes has demonstrated, the most comprehensive record of Victorian musical activities. Fashions in female costume are chronicled in a series of periodicals for the elegant lady, beginning with the important *Belle Assemblée* with its hand-colored drawings, and continuing through the *Lady's Magazine* and similar journals. The evolution of the illustrator's art may be studied in a great many of the periodicals, especially in the Christmas numbers which were so popular in the middle decades, but special mention must be made of the Newberry's remarkable collection of gift books and annuals, a chief feature of which was, of course, the engravings that to many judges represent the nadir of romantic expression.

The nineteenth century was not distinguished for the quality of its dramatic literature, but, despite the obstacles imposed by the London monopoly and the opposition to drama in many influential quarters, it was an age of continuous interest so far as actual performances were concerned. The historian of the English theater in the century has at his command a wealth of reminiscences in book form by the great and sub-great performers, managers, and playgoers of the age, but he needs to fill out his data with the more minute details available only in contemporary periodicals. There was no single theatrical paper which had the success that the *Musical Times* had, for instance, in its sphere. Instead, there was a host of ephemeral papers whose evidence must be painstakingly pieced together. Here again the Newberry collection can be of substantial assistance. Dipping into the card-catalog, we find the *Dramatic Censor* (1800) the *Dramatic and Literary Censor* (1801), the *Theatrical Recorder* (1805-06), the *Dramatic Censor* (1811- the name was a popular one), *Drama, or the Theatrical Pocket Magazine* (1821-23), the *Theatrical Looker-on* (Birmingham, 1822-23), the *Dramatic Magazine* (1829-30), the *Theatrical Journal* (1835-40), the *Dramatic and Musical Review* (1842), the *Dramatic Times* (1846-51), the *Dramatic Register* (1851-53), and the *Theatre* (1855-97). Files of most of these are found in less than 10 libraries in the United States.

The Newberry is fortunate in possessing a fine variety of religious periodicals, from the serious organ addressed to the clergy and upper-class laity to the cheap weekly designed for wholesome Sabbath reading among the masses, and in allegiance from Nonconformist to Roman Catholic. The viewpoint of Dissent is expressed by, for instance, the *Eclectic Review and the Congregational Magazine*; that of the Evangelical party in the Church of England by the *Evangelical Magazine* and the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*; that of orthodox

Anglicanism by the *Church of England Magazine*; and that of Catholicism by the *Dublin Review* and the *Month*. The first efforts of various denominations to provide virtuous reading-matter for the poor may be studied in such periodicals as the *Cottage Magazine* (1815) and the *Christian's Penny Magazine* (1846-47), and the success of this movement in such weeklies as *Good Words*, which under the editorship of Norman Macleod reached a phenomenal circulation in the latter half of the century. Nor, not to forget the other side of the coin, is Victorian free thought unrepresented, for George Jacob Holyoake's *Reasoner* is on the Newberry shelves.

A significant measure of progress in the nineteenth century is the increase of journalism outside London. In the preceding century there was little printing and publishing activity beyond London except for Edinburgh, Dublin, and one or two other large towns. But from almost the beginning of the nineteenth century, weekly and monthly papers sprang up in towns which heretofore could not or would not have supported them. The Newberry collection reflects this dramatic spread of journalism under the force of circumstances in its many files not only from Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dublin but from Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, and Birmingham, cities which were practically the creation of the industrial age, and where political agitation in the first instance produced a press which in more settled times was converted to literary and scientific matters.

In the nineteenth century, too, as had seldom been the case since the days of Addison, Steele, and Defoe, there were periodicals which owed a great deal of their prestige in their own time, as they owe their fame today, to one man. The Newberry possesses most of the papers with which Leigh Hunt was associated either as editor or as principal contributor: the *Tatler*, the *Indicator*, the *Companion*, Leigh Hunt's *London Journal*, the *Literary Examiner*, and (though only a spasmodic file) the *Examiner*. It has a file of Douglas Jerrold's *Shilling Magazine*. There are, of course, files of Dickens' two successful periodical enterprises, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. And of the periodicals whose importance in literary history is all out of proportion to the circulation they attained or the span of life they enjoyed, the Newberry has an excellent variety, from the *Englishman's Magazine*, which in its brief course of only a few months printed work by Tennyson, Lamb, Hunt, and Clare, down to the *Yellow Book* and the *Savoy*, whose roster of contributors reads like the index to Holbrook Jackson's *The Eighteen Nineties*.

The Newberry collection, then, is rich in most aspects of Victorian periodical literature. Like that of every library, of course, this periodical collection is not of absolutely even strength. It should have one or two files of sporting magazines, to document the colorful life of the fox-hunting squire whom we meet in the pages of Apperley, Surtees, and Whyte-Milville. It lacks periodicals relating to English education, such as the *Journal of Education* and the *Schoolmaster*. And ideally one would desire a better representation of the cheap Sunday papers, of the type of *Bells' London Life and Sporting Chronicle*, which for decades were the only reading matter of a considerable segment of the urban working classes, and hence can tell us more than can any other source of the mentality and quality of the imagination that characterized these people, the coming masters of England. The social historian who finds, wherever he turns in contemporary sources, vehement denunciations of the sensational periodicals produced in huge numbers in Salisbury Square, would wish to have more actual examples available on the library shelves. The trash of today, it must never be forgotten, becomes the documents for tomorrow's historian. But this, besides being the prejudiced view of one who has perhaps lingered too long in the byways and back-alleys of nineteenth-century literature, is a counsel of perfection. The Newberry

collection, as it stands, can provide the material for a great deal of profitable research in nineteenth-century English periodicals.